

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, Congressman Wittman, along with 35 other Members of the House of Representatives, sent a letter to the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Chief of Naval Operations urging the Department of Defense not to reduce attack submarine procurement. Wittman, who serves as a Co-Chair of the Congressional Shipbuilding Caucus and as a member of the House Armed Services Committee, has been a continual advocate for a sustained two a year attack submarine build rate.

The letter signed by Wittman states:

Dear Secretary Gates, Secretary Mabus and Admiral Roughead:

In recent weeks, there have been media reports suggesting that the shipbuilding plan, to be submitted with the Fiscal Year 2011 budget, could include a reduction in attack submarine procurement. We write today in strong opposition to such a plan.

As you know, last year the Department of Defense and the Navy reached an important milestone when it signed a \$14 billion, five year multi-year procurement (MYP) contract with General Dynamics Electric Boat, and their partner Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding, for the procurement of eight Virginia-class submarines between 2009 and 2013 -- including the increase to two a year starting in 2011. This "Block III" contract capped a two year effort to accelerate the increased procurement of new Virginia-class submarines from 2012 to 2011. This was an important step towards ensuring that the submarine force has the resources it needs to accomplish its diverse array of missions, and protect the security of our nation.

Yet, based on the Navy's own stated force requirements in the FY2009 shipbuilding plan - the last one submitted to Congress - our nation will still have fewer than the 48 submarines we need for a 12 year period between 2022 and 2033. Further, in 2008, the attack submarine force was only able to meet a total of 49 percent of all missions requested of it - and it will be asked to continue to "do more with less" as the demand for their unique stealth and intelligence capabilities increases while force levels decline.

That is why we are concerned that the Department of Defense may be considering a potential one-boat reduction in the number of submarines it plans to procure between 2011 and 2015, the period covered by the next shipbuilding plan to be submitted to Congress with the FY2011 budget request. If these reports are accurate, it would represent a significant step backwards from clear Congressional support for a sustained two a year attack submarine build rate, as well as from clearly identified needs within the submarine force and our domestic industrial base.

As such, we hope you will reconsider any proposals to reduce the submarine build rate during this period and fully support a sustained two-a-year procurement rate beginning in FY2011. We believe that such a policy is in interest of our long term submarine force structure requirements, our industrial base and our nation.

We look forward to your response. As always, thank you for your service to our nation and

dedication to the men and women of our Armed Forces.

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.